

5.15.07: Lt. Governor's Address at the California Clean Tech Open

What I want all of you to do is to go for it! Dream up great ideas about how we can transport people and goods across our vast country and around the world, fuel our industries, heat and cool our homes and offices, and ferment our wine and beer in environmentally friendly ways. Go figure out ways to collect solar and wind energy and store it for future use. Grow algae that can become bio diesel.

May 15, 2007

It is a great honor, and frankly a lot of fun, to participate in the opening ceremony of California's Clean Tech Open - a competition among entrepreneurs, dreamers, techies and venture capitalists to find and develop the best solutions to the climate crisis. The five categories in which competition will be judged cover the broad range necessary for the successful reduction of greenhouse gas energy consumption. What you're doing here is extremely important.

As I was flying here from Los Angeles, it occurred to me that another competition took place about 400 years ago. The Age of Exploration was underway. Maybe we should just call it the Age of Domination. The explorers and sailors had no idea where they were as they sailed their ships on the oceans. They couldn't figure it out. They could figure out how far north or south they were, but not how far east or west. This most difficult problem was eventually solved by a competition sponsored by the British Admiralty. Just like the Clean Tech Open, they offered a large award to whoever could solve the problem of global positioning. Eventually the problem was solved by gentlemen who figured out how to use a clock as a way of measuring the distance from a town called Greenwich. I am sure that you have heard of Greenwich Mean Time. Of course the clock had to not only keep accurate time, it had to do so while bouncing over waves and being awash with salt water. Not an easy task then or now. One final point on this competition that bears attention today, the successful contestant spent the next 30 years trying to get paid.

So, for you "wannabe" entrepreneurs and venture capitalists here today, the big question is: When is the payday?

Well, payday is here for America when you figure out how to deal with the issue of climate change and energy needs. Our planet is facing a huge problem - climate change - which we are discovering is largely of our own making. And this problem we've helped create is quickly descending upon us in the form of rising sea levels, unsure water supplies, altered growing seasons, food shortages, spreading tropical diseases, mass migrations, and more droughts, floods and heat waves.

Residents of the Bay Area have seen the maps of what happens when the Pacific Ocean rises a mere six inches. For those of you who have all of that fresh water available for your plants and manufacturing systems, you're going to just have to learn to love saltwater. The rising Pacific Ocean will force sea water into the central delta. There will not be enough freshwater from California's rivers to push the ocean back. The massive Central Valley Water Project that brings freshwater to Santa Clara County via the San Felipe Project will soon be delivering saltwater. Agricultural crops, silicon chips and high-tech businesses do not grow too well when the water system delivers saltwater instead of freshwater. For those of you who are not in the Silicon Valley or in agriculture, and all you care about is this wonderful city by the Bay called San Francisco, you too should be concerned unless all you drink is Napa Valley wine. San Francisco's drinking water comes from the Sierra Nevada Mountains via the Hetch Hetchy water system. Scientists estimate that due to the current and future greenhouse gas levels in our atmosphere, the Sierra Nevada snow pack will be 30% to 70% below historic levels. If you happen to be involved in healthcare, you're going to love tropical diseases in the Central Valley of California and along coastal areas. These are major fundamental changes to our environment and our way of life.

Yes, we have serious problems in our future. But in this crowd tonight, there are solutions to the most critical of all human problems - the climate crisis.

The climate crisis is the result of a fundamental flaw in the energy policy of the United States. That flaw went unnoticed for a very long time. We've been going on our merry way and consuming 25-30% of the world's energy, primarily sourced

from carbon-based fossil fuels such as petroleum, coal, and natural gas. 'Who cares? No problem! The atmosphere can absorb it!' Sadly, the United States and now the big emerging countries, China, India, Indonesia and others, continue their economic engines using a carbon-based energy policy. America has only tinkered with alternative energy policies and clearly has not established the political and governmental groundwork for a new energy world that is not based on greenhouse gas emitting sources of energy.

So what are we going to do about it? Well, we'll have the Clean Tech Open and we'll create all kinds of new companies that will suddenly spring forth to solve the problem. Yes, the solutions to the problem will be found. But until there is a fundamental change in the policies of this nation and other nations about how we fuel our economies, the problem will not be solved.

What I want all of you to do is to go for it! Dream up great ideas about how we can transport people and goods across our vast country and around the world, fuel our industries, heat and cool our homes and offices, and ferment our wine and beer in environmentally friendly ways. Go figure out ways to collect solar and wind energy and store it for future use. Grow algae that can become bio diesel. Go ahead, but as long as our national energy policy is wedded to coal and oil we will not solve the climate crisis.

Therefore, our challenge is not just what is being addressed here today at the Clean Tech Open in developing these marvelous ideas and bringing in the venture capital world to invest money in the best projects. Another step, just as important, must take place. Human society must accept the fundamental reality that the public policy - yes, laws, tax policy, subsidies and regulations - must change. We must realign our priorities and establish the proper incentives for our nation's entrepreneurs. Until we do so, most of the winning ideas and those not yet ready for prime time will not mature and flourish and be the solution to a crisis in our climate. As you scurry around, writing our business plans and figuring out how you can put together a winning idea, and as you venture capitalists prepare to write the big check, you must also spend time dealing with the politics of energy and public policy. When great ideas, entrepreneurial spirit, capital and public policy come together, there will be a solution to the problem of climate change. Then and only then will this Clean Tech Open competition be successful.

Are we ready for that challenge? Apparently, in this room there are numerous companies that say we need to move on the inventive side of this coin. We've got to figure out all of the new ways in which it can be done. That is wonderful and terribly important. If those same very powerful companies are willing to also invest in the political process to fundamentally change this nation's public policy on energy, you will have extraordinary growth. So that's our dual challenge today.

With the Clean Tech Open, the ideas are already filling your minds along with hopes and dreams. I suspect there are a lot of dreamers in our crowd and there are a lot of industries in our crowd that will take an idea and make a lot of money. Coupled with appropriate public policy, those ideas will not only make a lot of money for the entrepreneurs and the investors, but will also give us a solution to the fundamental crisis of our time and of future generations - the crisis of climate change. So go for it folks! Help solve the problem and at the same time invest your efforts in the politics that will change the energy policy of this nation. In the meantime, I will impatiently wait to learn the winners of this competition and to see our nation's policies change.

Thank you.

- Lt. Governor Garamendi